

## Geese

### Human Health Risk

### Ecological Risk

**M**

### Socioeconomic Risk

**L**

Suburban areas, with their expanses of short grass, make attractive habitat for Canada geese. In the 1980s, the population of geese living in New Jersey increased dramatically and has continued to rise. Overpopulation of geese creates a nuisance, reduces diversity of waterfowl, and may contribute to excess nutrient loadings in area waterways.

### What's at risk?

Primary ecosystems at risk are urban and suburban lakes, parks, and golf courses. Atlantic (migrating) goose populations may also be at risk from the overabundance of year-round populations in New Jersey.

### What are the ecological impacts in New Jersey?

The year-round goose population, estimated at about 100,000, may swell to as much as 280,000 in the winter as a result of migrating flocks. High populations of geese compete with other species of waterfowl for food and nesting sites, affecting species diversity. Resident geese are larger and better adapted to human environments, which favors their abundance relative to Atlantic (migrating) geese. At peak numbers, goose droppings may amount to more than 200 tons per day. In areas heavily populated by geese, their droppings increase nutrient loadings to streams and lakes, many of which are already overloaded from the effects of urban and agricultural runoff (see Phosphorus summary). This in turn can cause excessive algae growth, diminishing the aesthetic and ecological quality of the waterways. There is limited New Jersey-specific information on the ecological impacts of geese.

### What are the socioeconomic impacts in New Jersey?

Goose droppings also create a nuisance on sidewalks, lawns, and golf courses. There have been two reports of individuals becoming sick from contact with goose droppings, but the effects appear to be minor as well as rare. Geese can also damage agricultural crops, but this is unlikely to be a significant concern in New Jersey.

### What's being done?

Canada geese are protected under federal and state law. A winter harvest (i.e., hunting) has been recently allowed in New Jersey to help control resident populations. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service issues hunting permits to control local populations of resident geese. Short term deterrents include harassment with noise, dogs, or other means. Longer term strategies include modification of lake and pond shorelines to discourage geese.